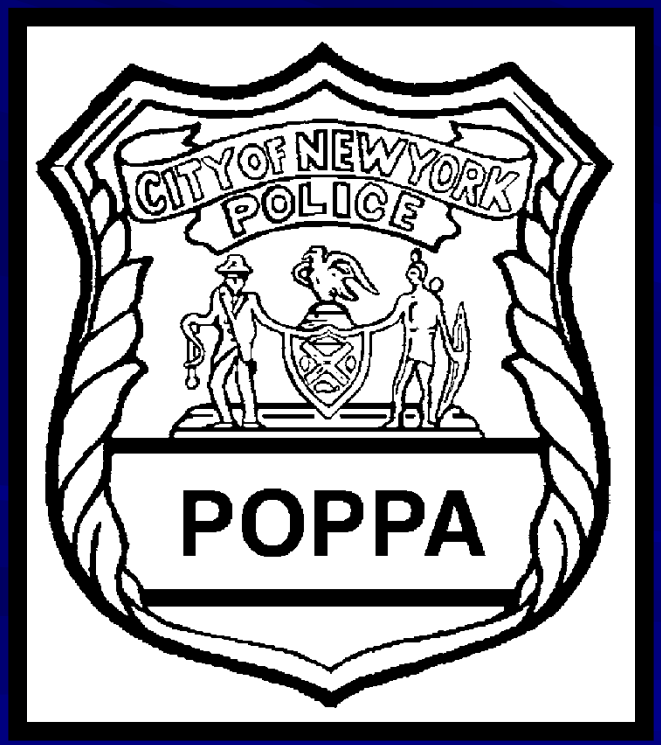
POPPA: Using Volunteer Peers for Building Resiliency and Suicide Prevention

Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance



DoD/VA Annual Suicide Prevention Conference:

All the Way Home:

Preventing Suicide Among Servicemembers and Veterans

Bill Genet, BS, CEAP

Founder and President, POPPA

Frank Dowling, MD

Medical Advisor, POPPA

Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry, SUNYSB

Similarities Between Military and Law Enforcement Experience

Psychological Complications

- Post Traumatic Stress
- Institutional Stress
- Alcohol Abuse
- Marital/Family Problems
- Excessive Aggression
- Suicide

Barriers to Seeking Help

- Fear of Work Consequences
  - Altered Career Path
  - Loss of Weapon
  - Loss of Assignment
- Fear of Stigmatization by Peers
- Feelings of Personal Weakness or Failure
- Distrust of Agency Internal Psychological Services
- Distrust of Mental Health System

POPPA: History and Development

- Started in 1996, in Response to Suicide Crisis
  26 NYPD Suicides Mid 1993-1995
- Independent, Confidential Volunteer Peer Based Assistance Program for NYPD Officers
- Peer Role Defined as Separate from Agency Role, Supervised by POPPA
- Confidentiality for All POPPA Interventions
  - Written Agreement with Agency
  - Ironclad Protection of Both Peer and Client
  - Only Exception is Imminent Danger to Self/Others
  - Because Volunteer Peer Role is with External Agency, Trust in Confidentiality is Higher

Volunteer Peer Support Officers (PSO's)

- Volunteer for the 24/7 POPPA Help-Line in Addition to Their Regular NYPD Assignment
- Screened by POPPA Administration, Peers and Clinicians
- Available for Additional POPPA Initiatives and Provide Surge Capacity for Mass Casualty Event
- ***Importance of Volunteer Peer-Not Voluntold***
  - Credibility with Rank and File of NYPD
  - Establishes Volunteer Peer as Role Model for Fellow Officers
  - Volunteerism Ensures Highest Quality of Personnel and the Maximum Delivery of Services
  - Reinforces the Cultural Imperative that Officers Take Care of Their Own…

24-Hour Peer Help Line

- Cornerstone of POPPA Program
- Voluntary Clients, Self Referrals Only
- Face-to-Face Meetings at Non-Agency Location
- No Referral Without Face-to-Face Meeting
- All Conversations Strictly Confidential
  - Not Part of Employment Record
  - Not Subject of Any Official Enquiries

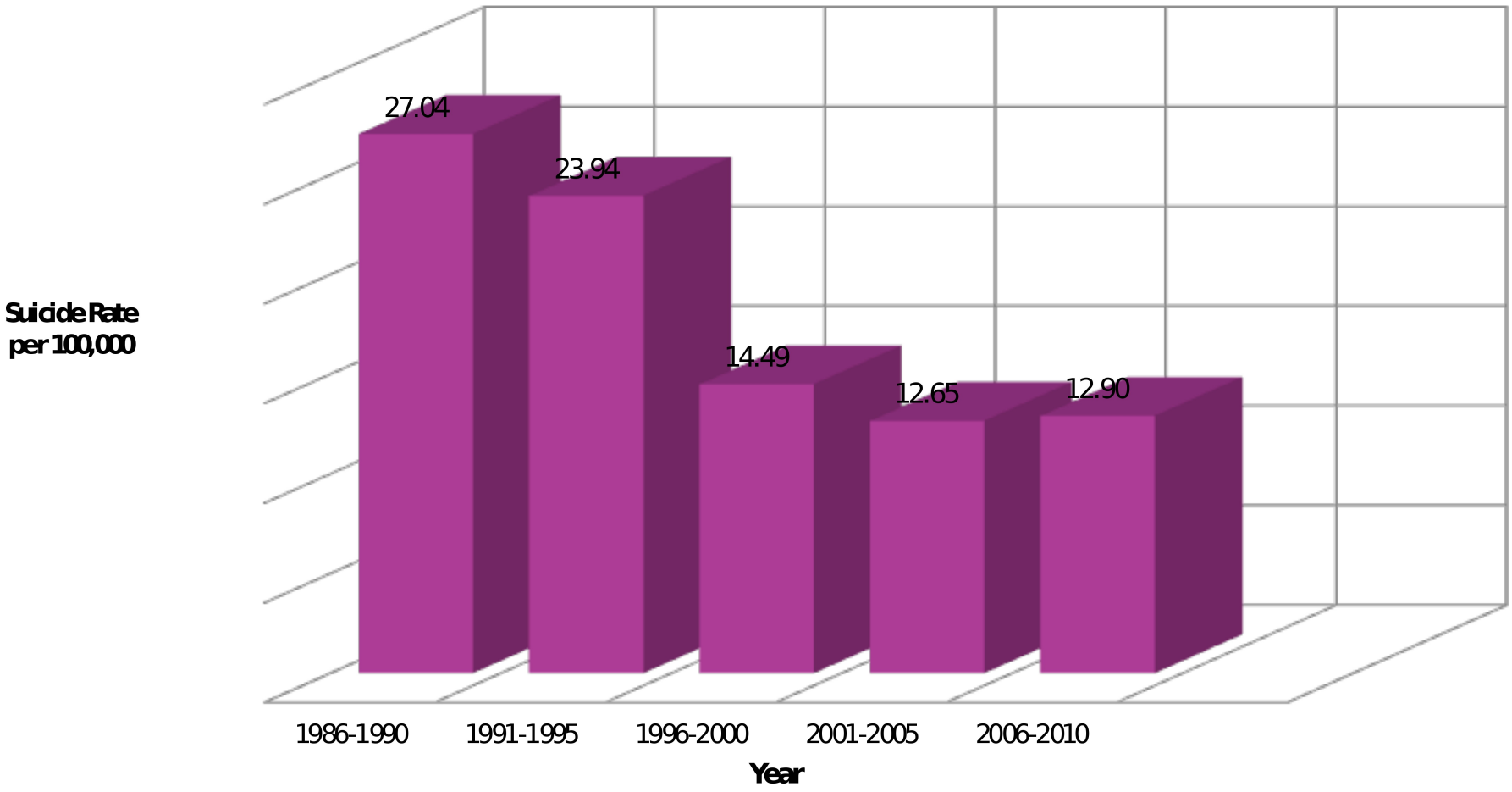
POPPA Help Line Results:
12,061 Calls 1996-2009

- 70% of Calls Result in Peer to Peer Meeting
- 40% of Callers Accept a Clinical Referral
- 90% of Cases Continue to Work Full Duty Without Any Restrictions
- 10% of Cases Use Confidential Sick Leave
- 90% of Sick Leave Cases Return to Full Duty
- Over 80 Suicides Prevented (High Risk Officers Who Stated Definitively That They Would Have Committed Suicide if POPPA Were Not Acceptable and Accessible to Them)

POPPA Programs

- 24 Hour Help Line Remains the Cornerstone of POPPA Interventions
- TRT (Trauma Response Teams)
  - Post 9/11 Response Effort
  - Project Liberty POPPA
- Retired Officers Program
- Peer Support Groups-Military Returnees
- RSP (Resiliency Support Program)

NYPD Suicide Rates 1986-2010



POPPA Contact Information

Bill Genet, Founder and President
212-298-9111
BILL.GENET@POPPANEWYORK.ORG
MAPBILL@AOL.COM
Frank Dowling, Medical Advisor
631-656-0472
DOWLING7@MSN.COM